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An Interview with Kari Paulson

Vice President, Market Development, ProQuest Books

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LA/RS: *So would you say we're going through, how shall we say it, a more "robust" period of experimentation with STL and other eBook models at this particular point in time?*

KP: Libraries have been "experimenting" with eBook models for some time but, yes, I do think there's a growing amount of experimentation in North America. Approval plans dominated book buying for a long time, but The North American market is increasingly moving away from approval plans and workflows as the primary acquisition model and experimenting with alternative acquisition models for books. There's more experimenting with demand-driven acquisition models, publisher direct models such as Evidence-Based Acquisition, with Print-on-Demand, or in combination with subscription. This experimentation is driven by a number of factors — greater pressure on budgets (needing to do more with less) and increased focus on outcomes but also because libraries have more data readily available. Libraries are experimenting with models to deliver better value for their institutions and for their patrons. Some of this, of course, depends on the individual library and budget. Experimentation is often incremental. Digital delivery of books offers an opportunity to do things differently. If we're not willing to experiment we miss the opportunity to get more out of digital delivery of content.

LA/RS: *And how would you describe the cycle of experimentation, within a given model?*

KP: You start here, with an earmarked budget and timeframe. You review results, tweak along the way, analyze the data and then you start the next phase, review and analyze and keep experimenting. Maybe a new round of funding offers another opportunity to try again and maybe revise the model based on the prior year result. As a rule, libraries are constrained by their annual budget for a year so we tend to see changes on a yearly cycle, and that's an important point to remember as we move forward with continuing experimentation.

In the print world, the library was often the place you went to access greatest breadth of content. Today, the whole world of what's available is at our fingertips, easily discoverable (but not necessarily easily accessible), and the library's "collection" is often inferior to what one can find on **Amazon** or **Google**. There is often a disparity for the end user in terms of what's available via the library and what's discoverable on the Web. So how do we keep the library relevant and viable? How



does the role of the library change in this "discovery environment?"

If you want to talk about experimenting, you have to ask what are we trying to solve for. Keeping the library relevant, making users aware of content that is available, connecting users to the best sources of information and the right resources, and making it easy for users to get to; exposure, discovery, and quick delivery are critical, and models like DDA can help with that.

LA/RS: *Some of us feel that there is a continuing desire to try to mimic in digital what we used to do — and what we know worked — in print. In more philosophical terms, I suppose you might say we continue to use print as a paradigm. Do you see that as well?*

KP: I do, and that's natural. It's what we know. We default to what is familiar. But there are limitations to continuing to use print as a model for digital delivery. What digital has done for data shouldn't be overlooked. There is more and more pressure and emphasis on "outcomes"; a demand for justification of expenditure and results. "The way things were" is often viewed as kind of a perfect world, but clearly there was need to improve on that — there's always room to improve. If we don't change, that's gonna kick us in the heels, especially if libraries aren't buying or providing access to the right things.

LA/RS: *Are you saying, then, that digital's offer of endless data (and that's my own emphasis) and focus on usage is a great boon to how we publish or how we acquire? Some might argue that all of the data we now have the privilege of accessing is perhaps a bit too much.*

KP: Usage isn't the only measure of value or outcome, but when we see 40% or more of purchased books going unused, book budgets are in a vulnerable place. We need to change

to deliver and demonstrate value and usage is an important component of that. How do those resources that get selected lead to the right outcomes? How does what we're providing actually correlate to the success of our students? This is new turf for a lot of libraries who didn't have to show that correlation previously, and that's putting librarians in a challenging position.

Did an item get used? What's the Cost Per Use? It's hard for libraries to put in perspective or quantify value precisely. Just because the CPU is low doesn't mean it has more value or correlates to a better outcome. Did the one person who used it go on to write the paper that moved the discipline forward? Possibly. So cheap isn't necessarily better, and we need to remember that. What is truly valuable is connecting users to the information they need — whether it's one user or thousands.

LA/RS: *Does it seem more straightforward to you that DDA and STL are answering a specific market need then — as models that are able to expose a broader range of content?*

KP: Whether DDA or STL is the answer or where it fits along the acquisition model "spectrum" is an open question; what's important for publishers and libraries alike is that we keep user engagement high.

If we expose only a limited set of content then we inhibit user discovery and user demand — and, I think, outcomes — and that makes the library, or books in particular, more vulnerable to budget cuts. How do we build the right defences around the book budget so it's not the one that gets cut in favor of other resources? That's the real question.

LA/RS: *Where do you see DDA and STL going in the near term?*

KP: As we talk with libraries, we hear from them that budgets remain flat or have gone up a little/down a little. But we frequently hear that more of the budget is going to journals — often taking money away from books. It's just easier to dip into something you can cut incrementally (books) vs. something you cut off totally, like a journals collection. And this is where experimentation comes in, what DDA and STL are valuable, and why we should continue to work to find models that deliver the best value for book budgets and make them more defensible against competing resources. 🌱